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RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0078
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0582
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0947
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1375
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 3749
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1144
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 1792
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC//DHO-7//
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1538
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
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RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK//DOOC/ECMO/CC/DAO/DOB/DOI//
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 001163

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/21/2011
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: ZCTU MEMBERS RECOUNT TO AMBASSADOR POLICE
BRUTALITY AND INCOMPETENCE

REF: HARARE 1143

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

Summary

11. (C) ZCTU leaders described to the Ambassador their arrest and brutal beatings by Zimbabwe police following their attempted demonstration on September 13 (Ref). They noted that the police van in which they were to be transported to the police station was on empty. At the notorious Matapi station, the Union members reported being systematically and brutally beaten with medical attention initially withheld. Based on conversations overheard, they did not believe their assailants to have been regular police. MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai told the press and diplomats September 21 that

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Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) was responsible. Undaunted, the ZCTU leaders vowed to continue the struggle. The U.S. can take pride in the role we played, through our local partner Amani Trust, in providing for the medical needs of the victims. End Summary.

Ambassador Visits ZCTU Protest Victims

12. (U) In the aftermath of the brutal police crackdown on ZCTU leadership and members on September 13 (Ref), Ambassador, accompanied by UK Ambassador to Zimbabwe Pocock, visited ZCTU Secretary General Lovemore Matombo in the private Dandaro clinic where he and about 10 of his

colleagues were receiving medical treatment. They provided the ambassadors a detailed description of their arrests and beatings. (Note: ZCTU president Wellington Chibebe was still hospitalized at the Avenues Clinic awaiting surgery. End Note.)

13. (U) Matombo and most of his colleagues sported bandages and plaster cast on broken and hurt arms and wrists; some complained of bruises and internal injuries. One was connected to an IV drip. One victim said he had a deep puncture wound on his leg. Several of the unionists said they had seen police swinging scythes or sickles.

Feckless Brutality

14. (C) The ZCTU members said that as they gathered to begin their protest, police approached and ordered them to sit down in the middle of the street. Police hit them with batons and then loaded them into a single police truck for transport to the notorious Matapi police station. (Note: A Zimbabwe judge had previously ordered the station closed due to its inhumane conditions.)

15. (C) The ZCTU members told us this was the only police vehicle deployed for the demonstration. Lucy Matibenga, the ZCTU Vice President, who was placed in the cab separate from the men, said the vehicle's gas gauge was nearly on empty when they were loaded into it. The police subsequently flagged down a passing police pick-up truck to provide more transport, but the driver said he only had enough fuel to go to Harare Central and couldn't help take the prisoners to the more distant Matapi station.

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16. (C) At Matapi, according to the union members, groups of five police beat them in pairs for about 20 minutes. Chibebe was apparently subjected to a particularly vicious beating as others could hear his screams. The beatings were so severe that three batons were splintered during the course of them. Matibenga said she and a colleague who have been trained in passive resistance techniques made a point of staring into the eyes of their assailants. They responded by pulling their caps over their eyes to prevent identification. Other ZCTU members, most of whom were too busy trying to protect themselves from blows to view their assailants, stated they were unable to make any identifications. They believed, however, from conversations they overheard that their assailants were not real police.

17. (C) Matibenga told the Ambassador that she heard friends and lawyers come to the station to inquire about them. Police denied they were there. Matibenga eventually called out to her friends. Police ultimately transferred them to Harare Central jail where they finally received medical attention for the first time, hours after the beatings.

Resolve to Continue On

18. (C) Matombo and the ZCTU members told the Ambassador they were more resolved than ever to continue their struggle and that they needed to act soon to maintain momentum. They also proudly claimed, in the face of criticism, that they had answered the question &where's the leadership?,⁸ and intended to respond to critics by asking &where are our followers?⁸ Matombo also commented that the opposition needed to adopt &struggle⁸ tactics and think in terms of a prolonged fight.

Tsvingirai weighs in

¶9. (U) At a public meeting with press and diplomats, attended by the Ambassador, to discuss the Trudy Stevenson Commission report (Septel), MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai said the government over-reaction had been orchestrated by the CIO and demonstrated its fear of the opposition. He added that ZCTU had been led to believe by the government, responding to International Labour Organization pressure, that it would allow more space for protests and demonstrations.

¶10. (C) Tsvingirai told the Ambassador on September 21 that he had learned that the government had created a special task force to carry out the operation, drawing on the presidential guard unit, police, ZANU-PF youth militia and party cadres. According to Tsvingirai, about 450 youth were brought in from Mashonaland East and Mashonaland West for the operation. Butressing Tsvingirai's observations that this was a well-planned and orchestrated response, one of our civil society contacts told us he had seen film of security forces beating sitting demonstrators, and superiors of the security forces looking on to ensure the beatings were carried out.

U.S. Role

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¶11. (C) Amani Trust, one of our DG partners, arranged for the hospital care for the victims, drawing down on USAID DG funds to cover the cost. Reginald Matcha-Hove of the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN), who is a medical doctor, provided initial medical assistance. (Comment: This is an outstanding example of USG-funded programs making an important*and possibly*life saving difference. End Comment.)

Comment

¶12. (C) By their extreme reaction, the regime hoped to nip further demonstrations in the bud. They have already failed. The National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) launched a demonstration September 20 in Zimbabwe's third city, Mutare, which was also violently broken up (septel). The opposition seems to be gathering momentum at a time when the government is literally running on empty with respect to resources. The image of the police van's gas gauge on empty is a perfect metaphor for the current state of play in Zimbabwe. For their part, Matombo and Chibebe, who were being criticized by their own people for unassertive and ineffective leadership, have now been turned into martyrs, surely not what the GOZ had had in mind. End Comment

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